

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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USMISSION NATO

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OECD ALSO FOR EMBASSY

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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJECT: GARRET FITZGERALD NEW FINE GAEL LEADER

REF: DUBLIN 1464

1. BY THE TIME THE FINE GAEL PARLIAMENTARY PARTY CAME TO
BALLOTING ON JULY 1 ALL OPPOSITION TO FITZGERALD AS PARTY
LEADER HAD EVAPORATED AND HE WAS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED. IN
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TYPICAL BUOYANT, OPTIMISTIC FASHION FITZGERALD ANNOUNCED
THAT HE INTENDED TO MAKE THE FINE GAEL PARTY THE LARGEST IN
IRELAND BY 1980, THIS IMMEDIATLY AFTER THE MOST CRUSHING
DEFEAT IN THE PARTY'S HISTORY.

2. OUTGOING FOREIGN MINISTER GARRET FITZGERALD SHOULD BE
WELL-KNOWN TO ADDRESSEES. HE HAS BEEN THE MOST POPULAR

AND MOST SUCCESSFUL OF THE COALITION MINISTERS, AND JUDGING FROM WHAT WE HEAR HE HAS BEEN VERY EFFECTIVE IN EC COUNCILS. PERSONALLY FITZGERALD IS THE MOST INTELLIGENT, ARTICULATE AND CHARISMATIC OF THE IRISH LEADERS. HE HAS A FORMIDABLE AND VERY QUICK MIND, ALMOST A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY, AND IMPRESSIVE ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS. HE HAS IMMENSE ENERGY AND STAMINA, OFTEN WORKING 15-HOUR DAYS. HIS ASSISTANTS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTERY HAVE FOUND IT NECESSARY TO DOUBLE-TEAM IN ORDER TO KEEP UP WITH HIM.

3. GARRET FITZGERALD STANDS WELL TO THE LEFT OF THE MAJORITY OF THE GENERALLY CONSERVATIVE FINE GAEIL MEMBERS, AND HE HAS MADE NO SECRET OF THE FACT THAT HE WANTS TO CHANGE THE PARTY INTO A MORE LIBERAL AND MODERN VEHICLE WHICH WOULD EMPHASIZE RAPID BUT PEACEFUL SOCIAL CHANGE. HE IS, FOR INSTANCE, STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF LEGALIZING DIVORCE AND CONTRACEPTION IN THE REPUBLIC. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, HOWEVER, WHETHER HE CAN REMOLD THE PARTY INTO HIS WAY OF THINKING, OR WHETHER AN EFFORT TO REMOLD THE PARTY MIGHT SPLIT OR DIMINISH ITS STRENGTH. HE TAKES OVER A PARTY WHICH IS LOW IN MORALE AND PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTH. HIS ELAN AND MASTERY OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ARE ALMOST LEGENDARY, AND THE IRISH TEND TO PAY A LOT OF ATTENTION TO DEBATES IN THE DAIL, WITH LONG DAILY NEWSPAPER REPORTS AND COMMENTS. THUS FITZGERALD SHOULD BE A MOST EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION LEADER AND THE TRIUMPHANT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FIANNA FAIL WILL HAVE NO EASY ROAD IN GOVERNMENT. WE ARE SURE THAT FITZGERALD BY NOW HAS MEMORIZED EVERY WORD OF THE FIANNA FAIL MANIFESTO WITH ITS MANY PROMISES.

4. FITZGERALD HAS STRESSED SINCE THE ELECTION THAT HE WANTS TO CONTINUE AN EFFECTIVE ALLIANCE IF NOT OUTRIGHT COALITION WITH THE LABOR PARTY. IT WILL PROBABLY BE A WHILE, HOWEVER, BEFORE LABOR WILL REACT TO SUCH ENTICEMENTS. WITH FITZGERALD PERSONALLY IN FAVOR OF A PROGRAM WHICH COULD EASILY BE DESCRIBED AS SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC, THE LABOR PARTY COULD BE IN DANGER OF BEING SWALLOWED UP ENTIRELY, AND THE SURVIVAL INSTINCT DICTATES CAUTION. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE IRELAND WILL HAVE A DOUBLE-HEADED OPPOSITION, BUT ONE WHICH WILL GENERALLY COOPERATE IN MOST THINGS.

5. ON NORTHERN IRELAND FITZGERALD HAS FOLLOWED A CONSENSITIVE POLICY OF COOPERATION WITH HMG IN MOST AREAS, BUT WITH INSISTENCE ON MOVING TOWARD A POWER-SHARING POLITICAL SOLUTION. HE IS PARTICULARLY ADAMANT AGAINST ANY TALKS WITH TERRORISTS. HE TOLD VISITING SENATOR MCGOVERN ON JULY 4 THAT HE SEES ROY MASON AS THE BEST NORTHERN IRELAND

SECRETARY SO FAR, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE HE HAS NOT MADE THE MISTAKE OF TALKING TO THE IRA. FITZGERALD'S NORTHERN IRELAND POLICY IS, IN FACT, QUITE CLOSE TO IN-COMING JACK LYNCH'S POLICY WITH THE ONE DIFFERENCE THAT FITZGERALD DOES NOT SUPPORT THE FIANNA FAIL POLICY OF CALLING FOR A BRITISH STATEMENT OF INTENT TO WITHDRAW. SUCH A STATEMENT WOULD ONLY ENCOURAGE THE IRA IN HIS OPINION. HOWEVER, IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY THAT FITZGERALD WILL TRY TO SCORE POINTS ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND QUESTION AS HE REALIZES THE IMPORTANCE TO THE REPUBLIC OF MAINTAINING A BASICALLY NON-PARTISAN POLICY.
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